Reflections on the "new antisemitism"

Revisiting Lenin and the national question

Jonah Henkle

ON NOVEMBER 15, New York University announced the opening of a new Center for the Study of Antisemitism. Among its central goals, "the Center will research both classical forms of antisemitism as well as the 'new antisemitism' and its links to anti-Zionism."[1] With the hermeneutic suspicion of the anti-Zionist Jew and Marxist-Leninist I am, I ask: what is this "new antisemitism," and what is to be done? Here, as I frequently do, I went to consult Lenin.

A product of early 20th-century Europe, Lenin was no stranger to antisemitism. His principled Marxist analysis of what can be referred to as "classical antisemitism" can be the reference point for our rigorous analysis of the so-called "new antisemitism" and its relationship to contemporary Palestinian national liberation in the wake of the Israeli government's siege of Gaza beginning on October 7, 2023.

Jewish scholars formed the theory of the "new antisemitism" in the late 20th and early 21st centuries amid growing anti-Zionist sentiment amongst the Western Left.[2] According to Irwin Cotler,

> In a word, classical or traditional antisemitism is the discrimination against, or denial of, the right of Jews to live as equal members of a free society; the new antisemitism — incompletely, or incorrectly, as "anti-Zionism" (since not all critiques of Zionism are anti-Semitic) — involves the discrimination against, denial of, or assault upon, the right of the Jewish people to live as an equal member of the family of nations.[3]

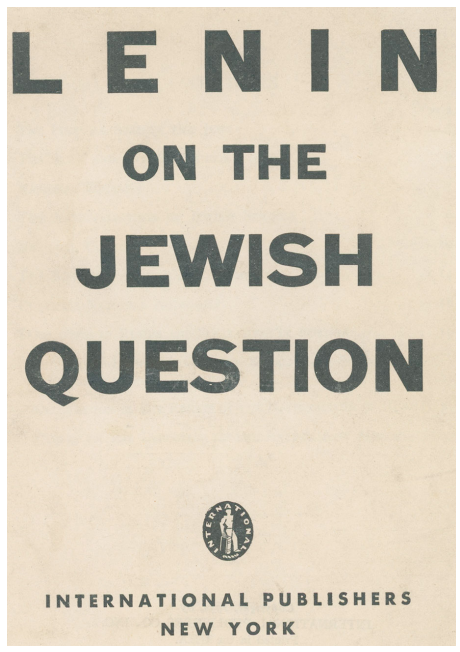
These framings from the Zionist camp slip quickly into the crude reductionist trick of conflating the Jewish people with the Israeli nation-state. Though Cotler claims, "not all critiques of Zionism are anti-Semitic," Cotler's position is characterized by denouncing "denial of, the legitimacy, if not the existence, of the State of Israel" as "political antisemitism."[4] This intentional blurring of the Jewish people and the State of Israel in one motion construes the criminal Israeli state (with its occupation, policies of apartheid, and genocidal rhetoric) as a Subject, which one can be racist against and renders "self-hating" the many Jews who join the call to criticize Israel.

As Cotler and his compatriots outline their theory for a "new antisemitism," it is clear the primary concern is with the preservation of Israeli apartheid by painting its outspoken critics as antisemitic. Political scientist Norman Finkelstein thoroughly documents the ways in which "American Jewish elites were, in effect and in plain sight, cynically appropriating 'anti-Semitism'—a historical phenomenon replete with suffering and martyrdom, on the one hand, and hatred and genocide, on the other—as an ideological weapon to defend and facilitate ethnic aggrandizement."[5] For a contemporary account of the genealogy of Zionists' misappropriation of antisemitism in favor of their political program of Jewish supremacy, Finkelstein's book *Beyond Chutzpah: On the Misuse of Antisemitism and the Abuse of History* (2008) is painstaking. What then of the radical critique of Jews and non-Jews alike? The existence of an anti-Zionist Jewish Left, from the days of the Jewish Labor Bund to the present activism of organizations like Jewish Voice for Peace and If Not Now pushing for a ceasefire in Gaza, clearly highlights the internal contradictions of the theory of the "new antisemitism." However, these contradictions are less apparent in the secular struggle for Palestinian liberation, let alone its Muslim factions. As a Left, we must bear out in our theory and our political support for the Palestinian National Liberation Movement and defenses against the baseless and Islamophobic accusations of (new) antisemitism from reactionaries.

Aside from the reactionary tendencies implicit to "the new antisemitism'' attempt to wrongly incorporate legitimate criticism of the Israeli state (anti-Zionism) with hatred of Jewish people (antisemitism), the new antisemitism theory has explicitly anti-Left roots. In their book *The New Anti-Semitism* (1974), Forster and Epstein dedicate an entire chapter to "The Radical Left," and other chapters targeting black radicals like Malcolm X and so-called "Arabs and Pro-Arabs." This text, which marks the foundation of the "new antisemitism" in academic discourse, claims,

> The Radical Left, comprising elements of the New and Old Left, poses a threat to Jewish people. It is committed to the liquidation of Israel. And in attempting to fulfill that commitment it has turned its fire on those who support Israel's existence as a Jewish state—principally Jews—while it warmly acclaims and is virtually allied with those seeking Israel's demise—Arabs, their friends in the communist world and others espousing the cause of "Third World" peoples, defined by them as including the downtrodden of Asia, Africa, Latin America and the Middle East, and American blacks.[6]

As the theory of the new antisemitism seems to identify, albeit accurately, the oppressed people of the world and those who fight for them as their theoretical enemies, it must become ever clearer to us that where the "new antisemitism" is mentioned as a point of concern, it is done so in opposition to the Left and the liberation of oppressed peoples.



Title page of *Lenin on the Jewish Question* (1934)

Enter Lenin — as the great class warrior he was, Lenin always deployed a class analysis in his writings on antisemitism. To this same effect, Lenin's view of nationalism was not myopic or limited to a narrow determination of good or bad. Rather, Lenin sought to importantly distinguish between nationalism in the interxest of the working class and liberal bourgeois nationalism. The national question then becomes a matter of strategy: how to unite people of all nations in a singular fight to overthrow capitalism. As Lenin argued, "Only by casting off every savage and foolish national prejudice, only by fusing together the workers of all countries into one alliance, can the working class become a force, offer resistance to capitalism, and achieve a serious improvement of its life."[7]

How, then, does Lenin suggest we crush the ethnic and national chauvinism that seeks to divide the working class of which both classical antisemitism and the reactionary misappropriation of antisemitism to support Zionism are a part? Lenin reminds us that "International culture," that is, our culture as communists, "is not non-national." Returning to his class analysis, Lenin claims, "In *every* national culture there are, even if undeveloped, the *elements* of a democratic and Socialist culture, because in *every* nation there are toilers and exploited masses, whose conditions of life inevitably give rise to a democratic and Socialist ideology."[8] Lenin does not call on us to crudely abolish national distinctions, the differences of ethnicity, religion, and race with which we identify. Instead, he calls upon us to fortify and develop internationalism, democracy, and socialism within every nation.

Proponents of a theory of the "new antisemitism" belong to the tradition of bourgeois nationalism Lenin identified in the early 20th century. It is a nationalism that serves elites in their oppression of other nations. In our current moment, it is a cynical nationalism of Jewish supremacy and the maintenance of Israeli hegemony, an ugly appendage of the American empire. Thus, for us anti-imperialists, our struggle for democracy and internationalism is the same struggle Lenin identified, albeit with historical and material contingencies. We must stay persistent against all forms of bourgeois nationalism, be that the old European antisemitism or the persistent anti-Arab and anti-Palestinian nationalism of Israeli Jewish ethnic supremacy. We do so by strengthening the progressive elements within our communities, be they white, black, Jewish, Arab, etc., and the internationalism between them. **|P**

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[1] "NYU to Create Center for the Study of Antisemitism" (November 15, 2023), available online at <https://www.nyu.edu/about/news-publications/news/2023/november/nyu-to-create--center-for-the-study-of-antisemitism-.html>.

[2] See Arnold Forster and Benjamin R. Epstein, *The New Anti-Semitism* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1974), and Irwin Cotler, "Human Rights and the New Anti-Jewishness: Sounding the Alarm," *Jewish People Policy Planning Institute* 1 (November 2002): 3–10, available online at <https://www.policyarchive.org/handle/10207/16032>.

[3] Cotler, "New Anti-Jewishness," 3-4.

[4] Ibid., 5.

[5] Norman G. Finkelstein, "The Not-so-New 'New Anti-Semitism,'" in *Beyond Chutzpah: On the Misuse of Anti-Semitism and the Abuse of History* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2008), 27.

[6] Forster and Epstein, *The New Anti-Semitism*, 125.

[7] V. I. Lenin, "The Pogroms against the Jews" (1919), in *Lenin on the Jewish Question* (New York: International Publishers, 1934), 9, available online at <https://stars.library.ucf.edu/prism/840/>.

[8] Ibid., 11.

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About the Platypus Affiliated Society
The Platypus Affiliated Society, established in December 2006, organizes reading groups, public fora, research and journalism focused on problems and tasks inherited from the "Old" (1920s–30s), "New" (1960s–70s) and post-political (1980s–90s) Left for the possibilities of emancipatory politics today.

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Statement of purpose

Taking stock of the universe of positions and goals that constitutes Leftist politics today, we are left with the disquieting suspicion that a deep commonality underlies the apparent variety: What exists today is built upon the desiccated remains of what was once possible.

In order to make sense of the present, we find it necessary to disentangle the vast accumulation of positions on the Left and to evaluate their saliency for the possible reconstitution of emancipatory politics in the present. Doing this implies a reconsideration of what is meant by the Left.

Our task begins from what we see as the general disenchantment with the present state of progressive politics. We feel that this disenchantment cannot be cast off by sheer will, by simply "carrying on the fight," but must be addressed and itself made an object of critique. Thus we begin with what immediately confronts us.

The *Platypus Review* is motivated by its sense that the Left is disoriented. We seek to be a forum among a variety of tendencies and approaches on the Left—not out of a concern with inclusion for its own sake, but rather to provoke disagreement and to open shared goals as sites of contestation. In this way, the recriminations and accusations arising from political disputes of the past may be harnessed to the project of clarifying the object of Leftist critique.

The *Platypus Review* hopes to create and sustain a space for interrogating and clarifying positions and orientations currently represented on the Left, a space in which questions may be raised and discussions pursued that would not otherwise take place. As long as submissions exhibit a genuine commitment to this project, all kinds of content will be considered for publication.

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"The epoch of empires"

An interview with Haz Al-Din

Ben B. and Clint M.

On July 12, 2022, Platypus Affiliated Society members Ben B. and Clint M. interviewed Haz Al-Din of the Infrared Collective. An edited transcript follows.

Ben B.: How did you first get interested in Marxism and the Left?

Haz Al-Din: This was early in my life. I was fascinated with it when I was in middle school, at 12 years old. But it was in 2010, my freshman year in high school, when I started to seriously adopt Marxism as a worldview, as something that represents the truth in comparison to other ideologies or religions. It's pretty much been my entire adult life.

BB: What did you start reading?

HA: I began trying to read the Marxist classics. These were incomprehensible to me. It came to a point where I started reading other Marxists online, who would break things down to me in a more comprehensible way. The stuff that I started to read in addition to that was popularizers — I needed people in the present who could introduce me to this wealth of knowledge. Having YouTube at my disposal, I would discover people like Slavoj Žižek, who was a popularizer. Oddly, that put me down a rabbit hole, which would introduce me to not only Marxism but also modern European philosophy and the various continental schools of thinking of the 20th century, from Adorno to the French school.

BB: Between then and now, how did you get to the current point in your thinking? Who influenced you, and what got you into Marxism-Leninism?

HA: I did not begin as a Marxist-Leninist. I was what you would call a Western Marxist. As the years passed, there was a quantitative increase in my level of knowledge and familiarity with philosophy and various thinkers. I was genuinely disturbed at a point. When I first graduated high school, I wasn't part of a group, a discourse, or a friend circle. When I believed that Marxism was true, that was not socially reinforced for me in any way. I became familiar with Cartesian doubt: I had to retain the possibility that this whole ideology I had adopted, used to make sense of the world, and given so much emotional investment was completely wrong. What makes it a science? Is it scientific in the same way that my computer was made by scientists, or that medicine is scientific? That set me on the path of trying to prove the correctness of Marxism through theory.

This was probably the first moment that I began to, out of necessity, distinguish myself from the "discursive" Marxist Left. These people had adopted world views and positions such as ecologism, the environmentalist idea of having to return to Mother Nature. These were radically incompatible with the justification I had arrived at for proving the truth of Marxism.

That specific justification was my introduction to the critical tradition: Marxism as a form of criticism, the basic understanding of the non-givenness of the world. We structure the world in a specific way, socially mediating it. This was why Marxism and its theory of historical materialism and struggle was true. It's a theory about how our world is structured.

I had adopted the view — which was reflected in Lukács, who was probably the bedrock of where I was coming from, and also Althusser — that the science of Marxism concerns taking the social, historical sphere of class struggle, and subjecting it to knowledge. Before, it was obfuscated through ideology and only referred to indirectly. It is an epistemological model of history; Althusser speaks about mathematics as opening up a continent of knowledge, then natural science opened up a continent of knowledge. Marxism was opening up a new continent of knowledge of history and sociality. For Lukács, it's the same: proletarian consciousness allows, for the first time in history, for a class to become fully transparent to itself and rational consciousness through knowledge.

Being firm in this position in a principled manner put me at odds with the Left as it had existed. However, I still clung to this belief that all I had to do was persuade them of the necessity of understanding the truth of Marxism to bridge this gap. Leftists have these misconceptions because they're just not educated; all I would have to do is educate them about Marxism. I would have to educate them on all of the wrong perspectives they have, ranging from identity politics to environmentalism, and we would finally be able to combat the fascist threat that's looming. I know this sounds naïve now.

I was also within a tradition of Western Marxism — embodied by Lukács in *The Destruction of Reason* (1952) and the pessimism of Adorno and Horkheimer — anticipating a looming menace of fascism on the horizon that we would have to prevent.

This was the time of Gamergate (2014) — the culmination of the online culture war at the core of our generation. At first, I didn't know what it was or care about it. Then I saw its significance with the rise of the alt-Right and the culture war. I tried reflexively to justify the Leftist position. The problem is that these alt-Right people oppose the status quo, corporations, and, it appears, capitalism — but they're doing it from the perspective of the past, so it's reactionary.

As the social democratic tradition would stress, Marxism presupposes the achievements of liberalism and liberal capitalism. How we oppose the status quo and the establishment is completely different. In that sense, I was justifying why it is that Marxists, and Leftists generally, were situating themselves on the same side as the status quo. I was an apologist for Leftism. But despite being an apologist, I was still at a distance from them because, while I had to — in a principled way, from my perspective — justify Leftism, I later realized how their adoption of views was based on a completely corrupt culture of social virtue signaling, arbitrary career climbing, nasty tactics to bring each other down based on pathological motivation, and the shelteredness and privilege of college students, completely unexposed to the real world and the real working class.

I began to understand that, at least today, Leftism was basically the form of not only the consciousness of the bourgeoisie but the consciousness of this seemingly new class that was completely loyal to the ruling class — the professional-managerial class. I know many people take gripes with this specific classification, but nonetheless, I saw this urbanized, reflexive, and professional stratum as the basis of Leftism.

I was committed to a broad working-class movement, and I still believed that this was about building a movement of tens of millions of people. I was apologizing for Leftism because I thought that this was a step we had to go through before we could expose ourselves to the working class. But I realized that that gap was not based on education, reason, or rational persuasion: it was a gap of class difference proper, class consciousness proper. Their Leftism represented the class interests of a stratum that was materially opposed to the working class.

On arriving at Marxism-Leninism: in the beginning, I had remained a Lukácsian Western Marxist. I was not an anti-Stalinist, but I did view Stalinism as a deviation from the essence of the proletarian revolution. I adopted Bordiga's view one-for-one, which was that the phenomenon of Stalin was a romantic bourgeois revolution because it had its basis in the peasants and petit bourgeoisie. I saw it as an evolution of Jacobinism.

However, as time passed, I increasingly recognized the significance of China today, and studied it. At this point, I went dark. I stopped trying to engage with Leftists, doing anything in public in general, and I just committed myself to this difficult question of what kind of world we actually live in and what it means to be a communist today. I recognized that all of my presumptions about China were wrong, that something mysterious and strange was happening there. This was not a post-communist state; it wasn't simply a state that transitioned to capitalism.

The expectation everyone had was that, after the collapse of the USSR, the communist states were just a veneer for capitalism, and eventually, they would ditch the veneer and fully embrace liberalism or some other non-communist superstructure. But I started to recognize that this was not the case in China. I saw how it was actually liberal democracy that was seemingly condemned by history. China's version of communism, specifically with the new era of Xi Jinping Thought, offered a coherent and robust superstructure for our current mode of production.

I had to start taking this enigma seriously: why does China appear to be more advanced than the West? I set about studying the Cultural Revolution. It didn't take me long to recognize that this was the secret of the present, at least of communism and China's history. It was about the apparent chasm that opened up between the phenomenal force and the expression of communist ideology on the one hand and the actual material reality on the other.

Recognizing the Cultural Revolution to have been about this cleavage allowed me to appreciate the significance of the history of Marxism-Leninism beyond its ideological form, specifically in the West. There is a material reality in the history of socialism. The Cultural Revolution tried to discover that reality in terms of ideology and culture, but it failed. But this failure was secretly a type of success, because it allowed China to discover the material essence of its socialism, beyond ideology and culture — which Western Marxism-Leninism had never been able to accomplish, which is how I explain its failure. Western Marxism-Leninism is a reflexive ideology: it doesn't have any sense of a deeper, material — or, in Maoist terms, a primary — contradiction underlying reality itself. It's a representation of something happening elsewhere in the world.

It's hard to explain my complicated worldview at the time. I was very much into Soviet avant-garde, and I thought this aesthetic position had decisive significance for what communism meant. Reading Boris Groys's *The Total Art of Stalinism* (1988) and how he explained the transition from the Russian avant-garde to socialist realism indirectly explained to me the seeming transition between the urban, working-class Bolshevik movement of the revolution and the 1920s to the elevation of the peasants as the primary subject of socialism.

I realized my previous explanation of a romantic bourgeois revolution was wrong and undialectical. There is an essence of the bourgeoisie that does carry over into communism — to call it bourgeois is not justified because it assumes that this apparent bourgeois class has its material interests separate from the whole people, as naïve as that sounds.

I reevaluated my understanding of Marxism-Leninism, and consequently, Marxism as a whole had to be re-examined — the meaning of class and Marx's discovery. Western Marxism was completely antiquated. My recognition of the significance of Marxism-Leninism was an indictment of the entire enterprise of not only Western Marxism-Leninism but Western Marxism as a whole, which began with Lukács.

Clint M.: You've criticized the Communist Party USA (CPUSA) for not living up to the legacy of the Popular Front. You have an article on your Substack saying that the actual popular front is where Mao Zedong Thought is coming from.[1] How is the CPUSA today — particularly in its defense of the deep state against the candidacy of Donald Trump — not living up to the legacy of the Popular Front? How do you see the legacy of the Popular Front coming up from Mao Zedong Thought to the present moment, specifically to the Infrared Collective?

HA: The way I understand the achievement of the Popular Front in the history of communism is part of the same lineage as the Cultural Revolution. The Popular Front was the first acknowledgment that the form of the communist party and the communist ideology does not itself dictate the terms of the class struggle. On the one hand, there is a reflexive ideological and organizational form of the class struggle in the form of the communist party. On the other hand, this seemingly objective class struggle manifests itself not as the direct conflict between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie but between the "establishment" and the "people."

This difference is not just a type of cheap, vulgar rhetoric; it's an objective and material difference between the institutionalization of the nation, country, universal community of the people in a given country, and the superstructure versus the material reality of the people. There is some objective basis of sociality that is not reducible to the institutions that represent it. This cleavage between the unity of a people and the institutional unity of a people manifests itself in terms of the dialectic of the imperfect way in which states and superstructures represent people.

It's not just that there are too many qualities of a population to be given representation; it's more that there first is a people, followed by institutionalization. But the bourgeois state, from its inception, has always tried to premise the material reality of the social unity of the people — whether national or something else — in terms of its institutions. This is a form of class struggle. It's not a direct form, like in the labor movement, but it represents the class struggle at national and objective levels. As far as the Popular Front was concerned, the idea was just an acknowledgment of this fact.



Still from Haz Al-Din's "New Year Address" (2023)

It stems even from Lenin. His main difference, when he was polemicizing with the Mensheviks, was that they believed in a stageist, linear evolution of society. That led them to conclude that the city bourgeoisie was more advanced, and that they needed to ally with the Kadets[2] and join with them in opposing the Tsar. But Lenin stressed a distinction: yes, we need to ally with some democratic bourgeoisie; we're not in an advanced capitalist country. However, Lenin said, this democratic bourgeoisie will not come from the cities — that's the established bourgeoisie, whose class interest will be aligned with the Tsar when push comes to shove. It's not a revolutionary class; they're the winners of the rule of the Tsarist autocracy; they benefit from it. It will come from the peasants — the bourgeois democratic tendencies that are incipient among the peasantry, which are not established but are somehow discernable.

Within the interstices of the development of the Russian countryside, the class distinction between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie arises. Lenin said that this class struggle between the peasantry and the one apparent in the cities isn't the same thing. Here, for the first time in Marxism, there's a seemingly paradoxical dialectics of form. On the one hand, there is the class struggle between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, but on the other hand, there is a broader struggle, seemingly geographical, between the countryside and cities.

This concerns the question of "establishment": whether this class struggle acquires formalization or institutionalization. The Popular Front was an acknowledgment of that distinction. It recognized the threat of fascism to be coming from monopoly capital, coming from the top. It was not at the root of the people; it was at the top of the superstructure. It recognized an objective contradiction between the people not properly represented by this imperialist establishment and the imperialist establishment proper, whether geographically or otherwise.

The Popular Front was initially populistic in nature. Mao explains this in theoretical terms; he recognizes a primary contradiction, which is objective and material. In his case, that was between the Chinese people and the Japanese imperialists. For Mao, the class struggle, which communism would be decisive for, was confining itself to a secondary contradiction. The primary and secondary contradictions are related, but not directly.

It is proven that communists are the only ones capable of leading this primary struggle, because communists, through the science of Marxism, have to prove the truth of that science in a reality that's not already decided. If a communist party that isn't part of a popular front confines its activity only to itself, it never has to prove that it's correct in reality. It will always be an institution that arbitrates the terms of the criterion of its correctness or failure. Whereas the criterion of the ability of a communist party to be able to lead a popular front — which is not intrinsically communist — is not decided by the communist party; it has to prove itself through the skill of leadership, a more correct insight about what's going on, a more principled commitment to the anti-establishment struggle, a recognition of the inevitability of change, and a dispelling of all of the reactionary illusions that we can somehow prevent the inevitable transformation of the forces of production or proletarianization.

To return to understanding the Popular Front, it's like in *The Communist Manifesto* (1848) when Marx talks about feudal, reactionary, and petty-bourgeois socialism. They're all positioned on the same side against the incipient capitalist status quo. Marx says that communists are the only ones who can properly understand what this admittedly alien force is. A popular front represents the fact that this has to be proven in reality, which means recognizing that people are not inherently going to be communists, but they are positioned in such a way that puts them at odds with the status quo.

CM: Are the peasantry, the people, the masses supposed to become a class?

HA: I recognize that the working class in America seems like the middle class in many ways: it features characteristics that seem more similar to the peasantry in the past, rather than purely proletarianized people who have nothing except their labor. I realized that the conceptual language of Western Marxism dealt only with, on the one hand, a pure object in terms of defining class as an objective categorization of a type of people; on the other hand, a pure subjectivization, the searching for a revolutionary subject.

I found Heidegger, who is not well-liked by Marxists, for, at face value, admittedly understandable reasons. However, Heidegger developed the notion of *Dasein*,[3] which is neither an object nor a subject. A *Dasein* is a being for which the question of being has some decisive significance; it is opened up to the question of being. It seems like the peasantry proper is not a class in the strict modern scientific terms as an objective or a subjective categorization, but more like a *Dasein* out of which class distinction becomes intelligible.

The peasantry is not necessarily a class in itself; it is more the fertile soil from which the objective basis of class distinction rises. Modern society is caught in dialectical forms, where there is a class struggle in its objective reality — which is ambiguous and undecided; we don't know what that means — and then there's a formalization of class that occurs with the universal citizen that is urban in nature. One of the biggest issues was this lack of distinction between the objectivity of the class struggle and the subjective mediation of the class struggle.

There's a reason why Marx and Engels initially falsely believed that English industrial capitalism was the most historically advanced: the reality of class struggle had only been made apparent to them phenomenally in England. In England, it became clear what the essence of German society was; it was the class struggle they saw in England. In Heideggerian terms, they mistook this specific "disclosure" of being with being itself. They could not see that what they saw in England had significance, but what one is seeing and what is actually happening in world history is not the same; it's not identical; there's a discontinuity. The actual truth of what they saw in England was Russian Narodism,[4] a Russian popular revolution in the most backward part of Europe.

CM: How is the *Dasein* of the people or the peasantry in the backward part of Europe actually the future? How does that point to the task of socialism in terms of how we get there?

HA: There is an objective and inevitable social revolution that was foreboded, like an omen, by disclosure of the class struggle in industrial England. However, without Marxist scientific consciousness, this social revolution will fail because it does not have a proper consciousness of its own object. Because of this lack of consciousness of what its own object is, the social revolution at hand will hit a ceiling, and it won't be able to accomplish its resolution. It will be caught in a tragic cycle of incipient insurgency, conflict, and failure. It will be caught in all manner of confusions because it will inevitably have leadership. Lenin even said that when we don't have the socialist consciousness, the clerical consciousness can take its place; he used the specific example of a Catholic trade union. He said that reflexivization is inevitable. It's not just that a social revolution will happen on its own, without any mediation in terms of modern consciousness.

That's what modernity represents: it is how we mediate reality with a universal, rational consciousness. On the one hand, there's a material reality developing; on the other, there's a rational, universal consciousness of it, and there's a continuity between the two. Marxism is the only type of modern consciousness that can overcome the challenge of modernity; it can unleash the forces of production, which is to unleash the latent material forces of social revolution that the modern consciousness occludes because of its one-sidedness, its lack of dialectics, its lack of being able to open itself up to the possibility of a material reality it itself cannot premise.

CM: What is modernity, and is it the same or different from industrialization?

HA: They have one and the same source. Modernity is the singular point in history, which, on the one hand, from the perspective of its past, defines everything leading up to it; on the other hand, from the perspective of what happens afterward, it is a kind of apocalypse, which tasks us to recover from it.

The French Impressionist tradition does the most justice to the meaning of modernity after it happens. With Impressionism: there is an impression that reality is not fully there, but is subtly falling back into place.

In philosophical terms, modernity can be summed up by Descartes's "I think, therefore I am." It's the emptying of all substantive reality into the universal form of its reflexivization. Modernity is a cut after which nothing is ever the same, because everything is now called into question. Everything is called into demanding justification according to a universal consciousness and a universal rationality.

CM: How do you see liberalism as a form of Cartesian self-reflexivity? Why does liberalism actually betray the modern revolution?

HA: Liberalism represents the political form of modernity. It has its universal citizen, which recognizes no distinction and no particularity and reduces our social reality to the standard of the Cartesian subject. The modern revolution doesn't conclude with any inherent, substantive content; it's just an all-devouring leveler. It is not inherently disposed with any national, familial, patriarchal, or cultural reality, and that defines modernity: modernity is without distinction; it's a pure universalism devoid of any of that content.

The contradiction that gives rise to the self-consuming madness of fascism arises when, faced with a lack of content, the assumption is insisted upon that there is no content at all, and that every manifestation and symptom of some substantive

reality outside of the horizon of the universal Cartesian rationality is worthy of extermination and eradication. This paradoxically leads to the necessity of the introduction of something that had not existed in feudalism or pre-modern, pre-liberal society, which is a universal, rational, and reflexive justification for inequalities — that people are different because some are scientifically inferior, the distinction between the sexes, or the idea of the master race of Europeans, and that Asiatic barbarians represent the end of civilization.

In contrast to the view of feudalism and the pre-modern, pre-liberal past, all of the inequalities that exist were happenstance contingencies; they were not justified according to a universal modern consciousness. There's the great chain of being and the divine justification oftentimes, but that divine justification was an acknowledgment of a pure contingency; it comes from God, but God is not knowable to us, so it's still confined to mystery.

The terrifying conclusion of liberal modernity is that we can use the certainty of modernity to absolutely know and justify injustices and inequalities, and with that comes their formalization. Suddenly, liberal rights, including the freedom of expression and universal equality before the law, have to be given exceptions: some kind of speech is dangerous to the open society because it contradicts the foundations of liberalism, or, new categorizations of differences between people become formalized: second-class citizens, apartheid in South Africa, the racial laws that existed in Germany and the Confederacy.

Liberalism inevitably has to contradict itself and trample upon the rights of the people because it cannot be at peace with the fact that it itself does not determine its own premises. In contrast, communism represents the preservation of the achievement of modernity by subordinating the modern revolution into the development of a more substantive one.

With the example of the Marxists in China, this moment of negation represented by modernity is just a moment in the development of a wider Chinese history, so they can be at peace with material reality, which does not exist because of the rational modern consciousness but is the inheritance of something material. Dialectical materialism specifically provides for this reconciliation: "A" does not have to be "A" to be "A."

CM: Is that reconciliation open-ended? Is it the affirmation of a national tradition, or is it the achievement of the promise of modernity in some respect?

HA: It depends on what "national tradition" means, but it can be both. The nation is the form of a substantive social unity, for which it appears to be a more consistent representation. But, obviously nations change, and a national tradition is only proven from the perspective of the past. One cannot dogmatically say, "This is the national tradition"; there has to be an openness as to what a nation is.

However, that does not discount, that there is a substantive sociality that is not institutional. It can, in terms of its content, be defined as class struggle, because another synonym for class struggle, in Marxism, is the division of labor. Social labor must be presumed, which has this inherent quality of division; there's a contradiction immanent to it. That contradiction has form; there's a specific way in which that contradiction develops across history. That is what a nation tries to represent.

CM: What about the state? What do you make of the political task of the transitional state, the dictatorship of the proletariat, and what Marx calls the withering away of the state?

HA: When Marx spoke of the state, he spoke about the modern state. Even insofar as he would evaluate the statehood of the Asiatic societies, he did so from the perspective of the extent to which they resembled Hegel's modern state. The modern state is institutional. Even the word: it's a specific *state* of being; it's the *state* of sociality; it's the socialization of what it *is*, in some way.

However, in its incipient form, the modern state is always coupled with romantic nationalism precisely because the state establishes itself as the universal reality of reason without any — not even national — distinction. On the original state, the universal state of the French Republic — what was so French about it and the universal rights of man? Nothing. But this universality of the modern state, on the one hand, delimits the nation because it represents the singular unity, at the same time, of a more substantive unity. When that acquires cultural or aesthetical form, it is expressed in terms of romantic nationalism.

As far as the withering away of the state is concerned, it can only be accomplished when the necessity of this indiscriminate, universal form is made superfluous through a determinate relationship between the way in which a given unity of the people finds expression, and how that expression relates to individuals, communities, and real people. In short, when the substantive unity of the people, as Marx put it, can be given expression, whether aesthetically or scientifically, in such a way that is both determinate and universal, statehood itself and the modern state as we know it becomes dissolved. Not because it's abolished and wished away in favor of some local communes, but because it is brought to such a development that it realizes what it actually is in content.

CM: Can that happen at the level of a single nation-state, or is it a global task?

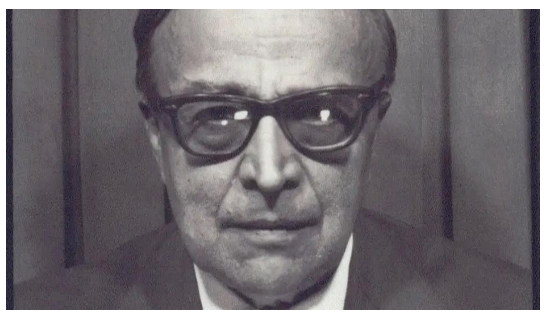
HA: It cannot happen at the level of a nation-state. Nation-states can't give expression to a polity in the 21st century. I believe what Kojève said: we are in "the epoch of empires" now,[5] the age of civilizational unities and polarities for which the modern nation-state is, at best, a moment of development. If it can be preserved, it's a part of a federation or something bigger than itself.

As far as one country is concerned, insofar as there exist non-communist states, the withering of the state, from a global perspective, is clearly not possible. That state must possess the quality of indiscriminate and indeterminate universality as it represents a specific, unconditional sovereignty in relation to other states. The withering away may not be accomplished in the fullest sense possible, but the process can be underway internally; you can have modern, universal vigilance insofar as you face the outside world, but internally, there can be an increasingly diminished role of the state.

In many ways, this characterizes Chinese society. It has much less harsh state intervention in people's affairs on a local level than, for example, what exists in the U.S. and Europe. The Chinese state has given rise to an authentic civil society with real forms of association that are not premised on an abstract, universal community, but on determinate relations of culture that prevail.

On the other hand, from a geopolitical perspective, part of the process of the withering away of the state is increasing a level of integration in terms of determinate relations between states. China infamously favors bilateral relations in the case of its disputes regarding the South China Sea over the UN's international law of indiscriminate unilateralism. The UN prefers that states establish relations with one another in a way that leaves less need for this universal insistence on sovereignty. You don't need to insist on your universal sovereignty if nobody tries to encroach upon it. As long as people respect their sovereignty as a premise, they can develop real, determinate relationships.

Historically, this characterized the Asiatic empires of the past. Their relationships were not defined by this hard line of abstract, universal sovereignty but by more tributary relations, where one acknowledges and respects the power, trade, and ceremonial relations. That has a lot to do with the development of *logos*,[6] beginning with Ancient Greece. This is why Hegel and Marx believed that history began with Europe proper and that Asia was asleep during this history.



Alexandre Kojève

BB: In this "Kojèvean" restructuring, the U.S. would also be its own empire bloc. Have there been historical American socialists and communists who grasped that special American road to socialism or communism?

HA: I don't think so, no. They tried to adopt the line from other countries without adequately applying it to their own conditions. There has always been a phenomenon in Western Marxism-Leninism — I'm guilty of this as well, but you have to do it — where polemical and factional disputes take the form of asking, "What is China doing? What is the Soviet Union doing? We're closer to their line than you are; you're deviating from them."

Similarly, as far as the U.S. is concerned, that one is a big enigma. I share Heidegger's view: America is the modern state proper; it is the culmination of modernity and probably the only truly modern state. The United States is *the* United States of America. The substantive quality of our country comes from that "America" part. So, is this the United States of two continents, including Canada, Mexico, and South America? No, it's the United States of a specific part of America.

Communism has an almost prophetic significance here — not because, as Browder said, "Communism is the Americanism of the twentieth century"[7] — but because of the paradoxical fact that as far as Russia, China, and the communist states were concerned, communism represented modernity. It represented a universalist negation of modernity, which the communist states managed to overcome and reconcile themselves with. But this seems like a strange, alchemical combination in America: communism on the one hand and the United States of America on the other hand; two modern negations, two modern universalisms that seem fundamentally incompatible. During the Cold War, it was almost explicit that there was Americanism as its own ideology, and then there was communism. There's a poetic irony and significance of communism in the U.S. as representing the chickens coming home to roost for modernity. Modernity must face off in this confrontation with what it is. It represents the first internal conflict of modernity.

Communism in America is an American civil war, America's conflict with itself. As far as the outcome, that is fundamentally undecided; we have no idea. But something tells me that we Americans are destined to discover what we are and what really unites us. Joe Biden is wrong: it's not an idea that unites us; there's something deeper than that. Nevertheless, despite that ambiguity, you see American sociality, an American way of life, an American people, and an American peasantry of some kind. This is the fertile soil of American communism.

BB: What do you think of the Bernie Sanders movement? In one of your more programmatic streams from 2020, you are critical of Marxists who oppose the Sanders movement. Those people said that you were not being Marxist enough and that you were too far to the Right. What was the significance of the Sanders movement for the potential of Marxism-Leninism in America?

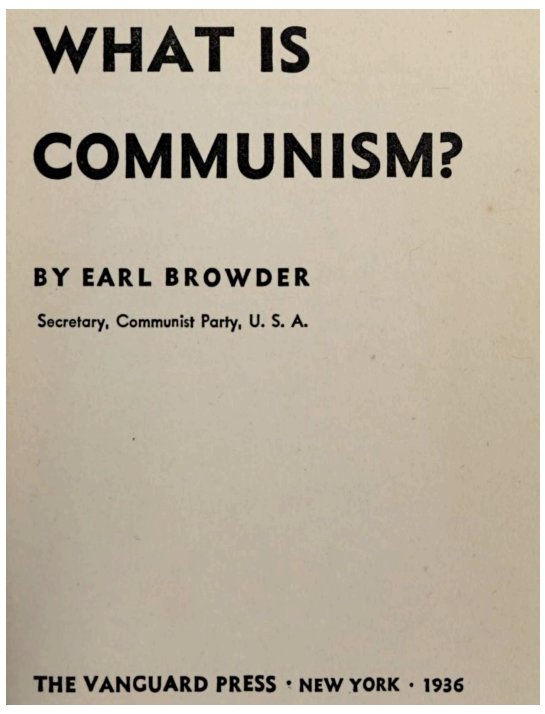
HA: The Sanders movement was the context of my understanding of why there must be education about Marxism — because we need to lead this movement to victory. I didn't understand it theoretically, but I did understand that this was the "progressive" democratic movement. I believed that, on the horizon, there was an incipient, new fascism, but I didn't attribute that to Trump. With the rise of Silicon Valley and this new, almost entirely monopolistic rentier class, I thought there would be an erosion of bourgeois democracy as we know it, that from the top down — not from Trump — there would be a new fascism. I represented Bernie as a challenge to that, a bourgeois democratic movement.

I thought of it as a popular front, but in a very naïve, Western communist sense that these are the progressive and liberal democratic people: *Democracy Now!* and *The Young Turks*. But, as much as I tried to think, "is this the Silicon Valley fascism I was anticipating?," I kept realizing that Trump has no ties to that class — maybe besides Peter Thiel, who was an exception because he is hated there; the whole "establishment" is against him.

My basic idea was that Trump was leading people astray and, in contrast to Sanders, was not ambiguous: he was representing a specific reactionary movement that did not leave open the possibilities that the Sanders movement did have. But I wasn't satisfied with this understanding of the Trump movement. For years I tried to understand it better, and now, I can clearly see that Sanders and Trump were just as ambiguous as one another. There may be aspects of Trump's MAGA movement that were left to be desired, but at the same time, they represented the same thing. It became clear to me in 2020 when we saw Bernie's movement return for a second time, that because of this hard distinction established between the MAGA movement and Sanders, Sanders had none of the popular potential or reality he did in 2015–16. I began to seriously reevaluate Trump's movement: is it reactionary? Maybe, but it's not reactionary from the perspective of progressive liberalism. If anything, it would be more reactionary from the perspective of its own failure — for example, Trump selling out — and its inability to articulate its own interests beyond just being deceived and tailing behind the leader.

I really like the idea of "Another America." Many think "Make America Great Again" means "return to the past." To me, it means there's another America that's not this one, a material, Bizarro World America. I'm very interested in that. My crazy thesis that so many people lost their minds over is that MAGA bears a lot of similarities to an American socialistic — even socialist realist — movement. Socialist realism is realism with a slight bent that turns everything into a Bizarro World, some slight enchantment. I said that MAGA is a kind of American socialism. Maybe reactionary socialism, sure, but this is at least the aesthetics of a socialist movement.

BB: In another stream, you raised the figure of a popular front against both parties. Now that the dust has settled on Bernie 2020 and Trump is not very active, where are the tasks of the American revolution and building American communism? Where would a popular front against both parties be in relation to the 2024 election, where we might see Trump or Bernie again?



Title page of Earl Browder, *What is Communism?* (1936)

HA: I'm pessimistic about the development of a popular front by that time; it's two years from now. But the seeds of a popular front appear to be intelligible now. There's that Andrew Yang guy; as much as no one trusts him — and I don't trust him — his platform contains a pretty good popular front-esque platform; it's an anti-monopolist platform, including ideas like political reforms for Congress.

This is one of the problems with this country. A popular front is political. When we're talking about electoralism, there are so many structural barriers just to get people elected and enable them to pursue policies independent from the two major parties. A popular front has to include, in its own content, a demand for the possibility for the state to formally make it possible, democratic reform, then the economic anti-monopolist agenda.

We must reevaluate the history of the Democratic Party and the New Deal because it came from the Farmers' Alliance and the Populist Party of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. As the parties undergo this realignment and we have this new opportunity, we should turn back to the past to learn: how did the current system emerge? Because, in a way, it's breaking apart. Those same elements that made it are also up in the air now.

I don't know if I see a popular front right now. There is the People's Party that exists, which may have potential in the future, but what I'm still most concerned with is the necessity of a communist party. Only when there's a communist party can it make the necessary alliances, networks, and connections to pursue the necessary path to form a popular front. A communist party is well disposed to lead it.

Right now, there is an internal civil war within the CPUSA, which I think is similar to the one that happened in the Cultural Revolution in China. It has a lot to do with the Sino-Soviet split and the vestiges of the Soviet revisionist Gorbachev's social democratic tendencies that are there, which Mao's Chinese were fighting against.

It's funny: I only care about the communist party. America is burning all around us. We're destined for a civil war. 2024 is around the corner, and who knows what's gonna happen. Me? I'm laser-focused on this niche of a niche of a niche, because I believe that if we can make the communist party great, the rest will follow. The problem is our inability to reach the masses. It's an internal problem. So, we must wage an inner jihad to resolve it. As far as getting a mass movement of millions, it will be easy if we can overcome this internal problem.

CM: Are you trying to take over the CPUSA? How do you see your social media practice as part of that?

HA: I very much respect procedure. It's actually one of the reasons I'm harassing the CPUSA. I believe in the legitimacy of form and procedure. We need to commit ourselves to that to set the precedent. If we're going to have a mass movement, we need to be able to do that. I'm attempting what I think is a rather unprecedented — and, some would say, rather insane — strategy. I am an influencer: I'm just an internet guy and a streamer, and I've cultivated an audience and a community, and all of this is just on the internet.

It's a little uncanny because I have spent years trying to study the sociology of the internet — how communities form, what this new form of media represents — with French theory bullshit. Becoming a streamer was easy for me because I already understood what it means and how it works. This sphere of phenomenal cultural meaning is monopolized by the media. That is being confused within the party for the actual material, substantive, organizational reality of how to mobilize people, what the praxis will be, and how to make a real, material party and a mass movement of the working class.

What is going on in the CPUSA is that there are very bad influencers in charge of the Party, with very bad party organizers and leaders. I want to create a division of labor between this ethereal sphere of ideology, meaning, and the smoke-and-mirror stuff that we human beings need to make sense of our reality; then, on the other hand, there is the reality of the real work of organization and the ability to respect the democratic centralist protocols, authority, and legitimacy.

The way I see it is that I am completely *persona non-grata* in the CPUSA. However, I tell my followers to join the Party and not say that they watch me. Join the Party and actually be good, effective leaders and organizers, and rise in the ranks, not because you have the writ of entitlement that comes from me, but because you're proving yourself in a way that I'm not establishing the criteria for; you're proving yourself by being good at working and leading in the Party. They can't purge my followers because they're not disclosing who they are. They can't just kick out a club or a chapter because this is all across the country; that's the benefit of social media.

I'm creating this division and struggle within the Party that I hope will lead to a more mature understanding. I want to force the Party to undergo a minor version of what the Chinese Communist Party had to go through in the Cultural Revolution, where they must become cognizant of the difference between culture and the material reality of the party. When they become cognizant of that, the rest will follow; they'll understand the significance of a popular front, they'll ditch the identity-politics tailism that they're pursuing, and they'll recognize what it means to be a party of the working class, not the representation of the working class, but the real working class.

It has caused the leadership and a lot of people in the Party a big headache. But when there's chaos under heaven, the situation is excellent.[8] The fact that the CPUSA has been tailing the Democrats for a long time is, for us, the primary contradiction. All the other esoteric Marxist ideas I have, all the cultural stuff — whatever. If we can get the CPUSA to detach itself from the Democrats, that will be a monumental victory. Our ambitions are modest; we're not thinking of ourselves as able to affect wider American politics right now — that's happening on a different temporality and scale. We just want to do something with the Communist Party. **|P**

Transcribed by Andrey K.

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[1] "The Brahmins of Democracy: Bolshevism versus Menshevism," *Infrared - Essays* (January 12, 2022), available online at <https://showinfrared.substack.com/p/the-brahmins-of-democracy>.

[2] Named after the abbreviation K-D, which stands for Konstitutsionno-demokraticheskaya partiya (Constitutional Democratic Party).

[3] [German] being, entity, existence, presence, etc.

[4] After the Narodniks, a political movement in Russia in the 1860s–70s.

[5] See Alexandre Kojève, "Outline of a Doctrine of French Policy" (1945), available online at <https://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/philosophy/works/fr/kojeve2.htm>: "The era where all of humanity together will be a political reality still remains in the distant future. The period of national political realities is over. This is the epoch of Empires, which is to say of transnational political unities, but formed by affiliated nations."

[6] [Ancient Greek] reason, calculation; the word; the inward thought and that by which it is expressed, etc.

[7] Earl Browder, "Who are the Americans?," in *What is Communism?* (New York: Vanguard Press, 1936), 21, italicized in the original, available online at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/browder/what-is-communism/index.htm>.

[8] A statement attributed to Mao.

Israel-Palestine and the "Left"

Chris Cutrone

> *Legalities.* — What the Nazis did to the Jews was unspeakable: language has no word for it, since even mass murder would have sounded, in face of its planned, systematic totality, like something from the good old days of the serial killer. And yet a term needed to be found if the victims—in any case too many for their names to be recalled—were to be spared the curse of having no thoughts turned unto them. So in English the concept of genocide was coined. But by being codified, as set down in the International Declaration of Human Rights, the unspeakable was made, for the sake of protest, commensurable. By its elevation to a concept, its possibility is virtually recognized: an institution to be forbidden, rejected, discussed. One day negotiations may take place in the forum of the United Nations on whether some new atrocity comes under the heading of genocide, whether nations have a right to intervene that they do not want to exercise in any case, and whether in view of the unforeseen difficulty of applying it in practice the whole concept of genocide should be removed from the statutes. Soon afterwards there are inside-page headlines in journalese: East Turkestan genocide programme nears completion.
> — Adorno, "Messages in a Bottle," orphaned from *Minima Moralia* (1944–47)

THIS BITTER APHORISM was written by Adorno, as part of his book *Minima Moralia*, at the end of World War II, and at the same time he and Frankfurt School Director Max Horkheimer were writing their *Dialectic of Enlightenment* by the poolside in Santa Monica, in which they (outrageously) wrote that perhaps the Hegelian *Weltgeist* — World-Spirit — of freedom dictated the destruction of small nations — in this case, that of the Jews — and that Marxists must accept and go along with this irresistible trend. For after all socialists were powerless to prevent it, but must still struggle to achieve socialism in its wake. "Never again!" after the Holocaust meant: *always* again. Makes you think.

There have been many instances in the meantime. For example, at around the same time as the Israeli War of Independence, there was the post-colonial Partition of India, which involved millions of victims in the creation of a Muslim state in Pakistan — repeated again when Bangladesh separated from the latter in the 1970s. And there is still Kashmir.

Is Alan Dershowitz to be proven right, that no one cares unless it is Jews who are doing it? (Or is it because they are "white"? But Jews are no more — or less — white than their fellow Semites, the Arabs, and anyway the majority of Israel's Jewish population is Mizrahi and Sephardic not Ashkenazi.) Or are the Islamists right that it matters because it's about al-Aqsa? Or are the millenarian Christians right about Armageddon and the beginning and end of the world? Or Hasidim who judge Zionism a blasphemy? Or is this the "Left's" Rapture, in which God's Elect ascend to Salvation and the rest are Left Behind? At least Hamas has "martyrdom" as consolation for the occupants of the former Roman province of Palestine.

Lenin and Trotsky

Speaking of the United Nations, this later fulfillment of Woodrow Wilson's League of Nations was embraced by Stalin, whereas the League was rejected by Lenin. This is a good way of illustrating the difference between Leninism and Stalinism: Stalinism is based on acceptance of the racist nationalist Wilson's vision instead of world proletarian socialist revolution and global dictatorship of the proletariat pursued by original historical Marxism.

This was the basis of Adorno's critique of "international law" under capitalism and its inherently ambiguous and hypocritical concepts such as "genocide." The United Nations definition of "genocide" includes that of so-called "cultural genocide." — What did Lenin say about that?

> The Socialists of *oppressed* nations must, in their turn, unfailingly fight for the complete (including organisational) unity of the *workers* of the oppressed and oppressing nationalities. The idea of the juridical separation of one nation from another (so-called "cultural-national autonomy" advocated by Bauer and Renner) is reactionary.[1]

Later on, Trotsky wrote that proletarian socialists must "Learn to Think":

> Ultra-left scholastics think not in concrete terms but in empty abstractions. They have transformed the idea of defeatism into such a vacuum. They can see vividly neither the process of war nor the process of revolution. They seek a hermetically sealed formula which excludes fresh air. But a formula of this kind can offer no orientation for the proletarian vanguard.[2]

Trotsky goes on to point out that "revolutionary defeatism" can only be *revolutionary* if it leads to proletarian socialist revolution. And that is not the case today. Today it can only be defeatism in a non-revolutionary way, playing into capitalist politics not building a socialist movement. It is bourgeois defeatism. The bourgeoisie can benefit — indeed profit — from the defeat of their opponents. Not so the workers. At least not as proletarian socialists, who are not the beneficiaries of capitalist competition, of which war is just a usual event. Capitalists always make a killing off war — no matter who wins or loses, the capitalists as such always profit. Capital always finds an opportunity.

It is a Stalinist contrivance to justify their opportunism that somehow divisions in the ruling class benefit the working class, regardless of the actual state of the latter's struggle and movement.

Demands

There is simply no proletarian socialist movement today. There is only petit bourgeois radicalism, more or less. This is what Lenin called "liberalism with bombs" and "reformism with guns" — at best. At worst, it is not even liberalism or reformism, but is just reactionary capitalist pseudo-politics. Actually, it is only ever more or less *crime*.

So let's examine the current demands of the Palestinian solidarity movement in the U.S.: "Ceasefire now!" and "Defund Israel!"

The latter of course is a repetition of the Black Lives Matter demand, to "defund" the police. It is a variety of impossibilism and hence of BLM's avowed nihilism. But not in the case of U.S. aid to Israel, military and otherwise, which could happen: Republican Presidential candidate Vivek Ramaswamy as well as Right-wing commentator Tucker Carlson have called for sun-setting U.S. aid to Israel, to cut the strings in the relationship and make it more an alliance — marriage of convenience? — than a dependency.

What "Defund Israel!" also is connected to is BDS — what I like to call BDSM, namely, Bondage, Domination, Sadism, Masochism — oh, excuse me! Boycott, Divest, Sanction. (The latter is really a matter of the former, but anyway:) The latter is an attempted repetition of the Anti-Apartheid Movement of South Africa in the 1970s–80s. The "Left" likes to think that it brought down Apartheid, but, no, that was the result of the end of the Cold War and the resolution of proxy conflicts between the U.S. and USSR. Israel-Palestine was supposed to be another, hence the Intifada and Oslo Accords peace process. It failed.

So this leaves history seemingly unfinished — no, not really. "Resistance" to "Apartheid" or "settler-colonialism" in Israel is not some unfinished business of the last century — although it might appear so.

What both "Ceasefire now!" and "Defund Israel!" have in common, whatever their merits and defects, is that they are demands on the capitalist state, and moreover on its political parties — specifically, demanding these things of one Party in particular, the Democrats.

But the Biden Administration has indeed called for a ceasefire: it wants different tactics and even strategy of Israel. Most importantly, it wants Israel to give "land for peace," end the settlements in the West Bank, and, most pertinently, not to devastate Gaza or displace the Palestinians there. Or so at least they say.

Why not believe them?



Tomer Hanuka, "The Death of Klinghoffer" (2014)

Genocide

And this brings us back to the charge of "genocide." There's no *mens rea*, and hence no consciousness of guilt with which to convict the Israelis. "Slow-motion genocide" is no genocide at all — unless history itself is the story of endless "genocides." The UN's International Court of Justice will take many years to come to a decision about the current Israeli war against Hamas.

Why not call it "ethnic cleansing," for example — a horrible enough crime? It is not at all clear even that this is the current Israeli intent in Gaza.

So what is going on here, between Israel and Palestine? Why was a two-state solution not achieved in the aftermath of the Cold War in the 1990s? It's actually very simple:

The Palestinian "political leadership" has refused to officially accept the existence of Israel as a state.

After many wars, uprisings, terrorism, etc., the Palestinians lost and the Israelis won.

The stronger were victorious and the weaker were defeated. Case closed. History's pronouncement is undeniable — and irreversible.

The Israelis expected a peace treaty of surrender by the Palestinians, which the Palestinians have refused. So Israel has continued its war against an enemy that has refused to surrender.

But the Palestinians have been defeated. This is not going to change. Ever.

Indeed, the recent Hamas attack was an act of desperation in a condition of defeat. This doesn't justify or condone it — indeed it convicts it of futility and wanton, pointless destructiveness. Hamas has admitted as much, as they say they expected an Israeli overreaction and the destruction of Gaza and the Palestinians there, which they thought at best would create a wider regional war and at worst would make the Palestinian question impossible to ignore by the international community. Hamas spent everything it had in one final bid for political relevance. So it's all in the end a public-relations stunt. How grotesque!

Is there any doubt that Israel would live at peace with the Palestinians if given the chance? But the "Left" don't want peace here.

Should "Marxists" or "socialists" accept the verdict of war — accept the victory of one side over another? Not necessarily. But the point would not be to rearrange capitalist settlements — which are indeed merely deck-chairs on the *Titanic* — but to struggle to overcome them entirely in socialist revolution.

Gangster rap

How to do so? Well, for one thing, we can aspire to not miseducate Palestinian, Arab or Muslim-Americans or any others in the U.S. and beyond: Rashida Tlaib is a travesty and tragedy of today's pseudo-"Leftism," specifically in its spurious "Palestinian solidarity." Progress means: Congress now has its very own Palestinian mascot. But no less tragic is the rest of the Squad of Democrat "socialists" in the U.S. Congress. — So is Bernie Sanders. Their miseducation and now willing complicity in the crimes of capitalist politics runs deeply historically. It has unfolded over many generations. It should not continue. The dead-end closing in Gaza bears a lesson.

Hamas is a capitalist group. What does this mean? It accepts capitalism and is not in any way a challenge to it. It is a particularly Right-wing form of capitalism. It is a criminal gang. They are indeed terrorists. Terrorism is by its very nature capitalist and not socialist politics. Capitalist crime. — Crime is capitalist, not socialist. It is the capitalism of the weak, not socialism. And the weak shall not inherit the Earth. They never have. They have perished irremediably — dust.

Hamas are the Kapos in the concentration camp, recruited from ordinary criminals to rule over the rest, and hoping to slip away and survive through the mayhem. They were literally chosen by Israel to rule the Gaza Strip. The game of "military transactions" (Hegel) played between Israel and Hamas, no matter how violent and gruesome, is merely negotiating the terms of capitalism, through extremely sensationalist marketing propaganda — in images as well as deeds. And the bargaining-chips that are played consist of ordinary people's lives — as victims and not agents, objects and not subjects of bloody capitalist politics. As the workers always are.

Historically, Marxists always rejected terrorism as a tactic and as a strategy. Why? Because it did not advance the working class's own necessary self-organization and action to achieve socialism, and indeed set it back, working against it, including but not only by provoking state repression. And what Marxism meant by the "terrorism" that they opposed was not at all what Hamas committed on October 7, which was targeted mass murder of civilians, but rather military actions against the capitalist state and its repressive apparatus — "legitimate" warfare. By contrast, Hamas has aimed and aims to divide the civilian population along religious or ethnic lines. This means dividing the working class. They wagered — and lost — the lives of Palestinians in ways capitalist politicians always do. Hamas's leadership are literally billionaires whose individual personal wealth rivals that of Donald Trump. But what have they built? Their wealth is skimmed off the misery of others — as with all gangsters. They will retire comfortably, while their fighters are slaughtered. Hamas is a criminal enterprise, both literally and figuratively — at least from a Marxist perspective.

Today's "Left" are a parody side-show of capitalist gangsterism, cheerleading the slaughter. They are the psychotics viewing events from the windows of the insane-asylum, expressing and enacting what British Leftist psychoanalyst Juliet Mitchell called the "normative psychosis of the capitalist social-political world"[3] — no less and perhaps a great deal more so than what the Symbionese Liberation Army's audiotaped communiqués called the "fascist insects" in what the "Left" has called the "Zionist entity." Or are we to be agents rather of *Aeon Flux*'s Monica contra Bregna? But Trevor Goodchild always wins, however resurrecting Aeon in the next episode after death each time. Can we wake from this nightmare film-loop of history? We've seen this movie already — billed as the Next Big Thing and quickly forgotten in the clickbait revenue stream of the latest Breaking News in capitalist exploitation. Gaza will be rebuilt by the workers of the world, Palestinian and otherwise.

Lenin again

This brings us back to Lenin's rejection of "national" capitalist states and of Woodrow Wilson's League of Nations after World War I. — By contrast with Stalin's acceptance and even embrace of the United Nations after WWII, which was the institutionalization of the victorious Allies for managing world politics set up by the U.S.: the terms of the USSR et al.'s participation in global capitalist politics. The world political order is the capitalist system of nation-states preferred by the U.S.

Lenin called the League of Nations set up by Woodrow Wilson after WWI a "den of thieves and their victims;" how much more so is the UN today: the complaint-office of the U.S.-led global order.

Unlike spurious fake "Marxists'" attempts to treat nations — let alone capitalist nation-states — as coherent fundamental units of political economy, Marx and subsequent Marxists recognized that political economy and its social relations — society — are not national but international and indeed global and cosmopolitan in nature and character. Nationalism — the reification of "national" identities — has always been and will always be retrograde. Even Hamas are not nationalists.

The PFLP, Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, an ostensibly "Marxist" socialist or communist force in Palestine, treats what they call the "national liberation struggle" over and prior to the struggle for socialism. As such, they support Hamas as the supposed "vanguard" of the national struggle of the Palestinians. The PFLP see themselves as the "Left" of the "national" or "democratic" struggle and movement — and Hamas as the Right wing. What does this mean? It means that, after the purported successful "national liberation struggle," then the political differences between Hamas and themselves will become manifest. But before that, the PFLP says that they don't want "ideological" differences to stand in the way of "political unity" with Hamas. They want a "cross-class popular alliance," very explicitly. It is vintage 1930s Stalinist Popular Frontism. It failed to stop "fascism and war" ever since then, and continues to do so now.

As counter-intuitive as it might sound, this is very much like how the supposed "Palestinian solidarity" movement in the U.S. conceives of itself: in "political unity" with "progressive liberal d/Democratic capitalist" politicians despite any and all "ideological differences."

But are these merely "ideological" differences? From a socialist let alone Marxist perspective, they must rather be recognized as political differences: socialists have an entirely different aim and goal from Hamas, in any number of respects.

But this is where the present "Left" is fundamentally confused and mistaken: socialism is not a matter of "progressive" capitalism or "progressive" reforms of capitalism. Nor is it about separate "stages" of struggle, which since the 1930s has never gotten beyond, nor ever even fulfilled this first "popular democratic national" stage. It has been a dead-end — always.

What is required in Palestine or Israel is the working-class political unity of Jewish and Arab and Muslim and Christian and other (for instance, "foreign/guest") workers in the struggle for socialism. This is entirely contrary to either Arab nationalism — such as that of the PFLP — or Islamism — as with Hamas. It is also contrary to Zionism. It is against the nation-state — the nationalist basis for politics.

Aftermath

In the Middle East specifically we see the aftermath of the collapse of the Ottoman Empire over a hundred years ago, after WWI, and the failure to create out of this any viable national states. There are rather many different ethnic and religious and linguistic and other cultural groups in the region — as indeed there are in every part of the world. There has been the necessary and not accidental oppression of minorities throughout the world in the attempt to enforce nationalist politics. "Decolonization" has necessarily and not accidentally meant this for the last century: forced population transfers, genocides, and continued oppression and exploitation. Socialists should not accept this let alone apologize for it — and certainly not regard it as somehow "progress." Which side should socialists have taken in the Biafra War? With Boko Haram today? The civil wars in Congo have not been merely about exotic metals.

But pluralistic liberal democracy has also failed in capitalism in places like the U.S. — not as spectacularly as in the Middle East and elsewhere, but still a failure. Division of the working class according to various sectarian and communitarian lines has prevailed. Where does this division originate? In capitalism itself, which both brings people together through trade and commerce and cooperation in labor, locally and globally, and divides them in competition in a situation of industrial production in which there are periodic crises of economic value of social activity and unemployment, commonly seen as due to technological innovation and necessity. There will be no possible restoration of petit-bourgeois democratic localism, "national" or otherwise.

So long as capitalism persists and is not overcome in socialism, globally, there will be social and geographical divisions that invite political divisions to which the working class and other people will become inevitably subject. There will be war, inter-national state and/or civil, "legitimate" or otherwise. Always capitalist war.

But original historical Marxism said, "No war but class war!" — refusing the terms of capitalist warfare. — I know that this is regarded as "ultra-Leftism" and "Marxist purism" and "dogmatism," but still. I prefer to maintain my self-respect as a dogmatic Marxist than pose in the mirror as a wannabe gangsta, mouthing the words to someone else's rap. "Intifada until victory!" will be a very long time. Forever. Never.

But we can still refuse to endorse and support the capitalist politics that actively seeks to exploit and enforce such divisions and warfare: Hamas and other dominant Palestinian political forces as well as Zionism are clear examples of such destructive politics, whose devastating and anti-social results we are seeing now as well as for the past century.

Do you get it yet, children? **|P**

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[1] V. I. Lenin, *Socialism and War* (1915), available online at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1915/s-w/>.

[2] Leon Trotsky, "Learn to Think," *The New International* IV, no. 7 (July 1938): 206–07, available online at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1938/05/think.htm>.

[3] E. Efe Çakmak and Bülent Somay, "There is never a psychopathology without the social context: An interview with Juliet Mitchell," *Eurozine* (April 12, 2006), available online at <https://www.eurozine.com/there-is-never-a-psychopathology-without-the-social-context/>.